

## Chicken tikka masala



**by** Heston Blumenthal  
**from** Further Adventures in Search of Perfection

**Serves 4**

**Preparation time overnight**

**Cooking time over 2 hours**

In this recipe, Heston uses grams for both solid and liquid measurements for pinpoint accuracy. To weigh liquids, any suitable container can be placed on digital scales and the scales reset to zero.

### **Ingredients**

#### **For the brine**

2kg/4lb 6½oz water

160g/5½oz table salt

8 chicken thighs, skin removed

#### **For the rub**

6 garlic bulbs

150g/5¼oz olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

200g/7oz fresh root ginger (about 2 pieces), peeled and roughly chopped

15g/½oz table salt

8 brined chicken thighs (see recipe below)

#### **For the yoghurt marinade**

100g/3½oz coriander seeds

65g/2½oz green cardamom pods

35g/1¼oz black cardamom pods

100g/3½oz cinnamon sticks

75g/2½ black peppercorns

25g/1oz cloves

125g/4½ cumin seeds

20g/¾oz mace

5 dried bay leaves

25g/1oz ghee

25g/1oz chickpea flour (available from Indian and Middle Eastern grocers)

50g/1¾oz olive oil  
10g/½oz Kashmiri chilli powder (lends an authentic character to the dish)  
450g/16oz Greek-style yoghurt  
½ tsp ground fenugreek leaves (available from specialist spice stores)  
8 chicken thighs, coated with rub

**For the cashew nut butter**

50g/1¾oz whole cashews  
2 tsp ghee (optional)

**For the toasted melon seeds**

20g/¾oz chirmagaz (dried melon seeds, available from specialist spice stores)  
1 tsp ghee  
salt, as needed

**For the masala sauce base**

5g/¼oz coriander seeds  
5g/¼oz cumin seeds  
1kg/2¼lb vine-ripened tomatoes  
100g/3½oz water  
50g/1¾oz ghee  
½ tsp Kashmiri chilli powder  
2 large onions (about 400g/14oz), finely diced  
5cm piece (about 25g/1oz) fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped  
salt, to taste  
40g/1½oz tomato purée  
10g/½oz roasted garlic purée (reserved from the rub)  
½ tsp reserved garam masala  
½ tsp ground fenugreek seeds  
1½ tsp ground turmeric

**For cooking the chicken**

100g/3½oz melted ghee  
chicken in yoghurt marinade

**For the finished dish**

reserved chicken tikka masala sauce  
50g/1¾oz Greek-style yoghurt  
35-80g/1¼-2¾oz coconut milk (according to taste)  
reserved cooked chicken  
100g/3½oz unsalted butter  
reserved cashew nut butter  
salt, to taste  
reserved toasted melon seeds  
1 green chilli, seeded and finely chopped

**For the naan**

750g/1½lb self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting  
20g/¾oz sugar

10g/½oz salt  
6g/¼oz baking powder  
230g/8¼oz water  
230g/8¼oz whole milk  
100g/3½oz free-range eggs  
ghee

### **Method**

You will need the following special equipment: kettle barbecue, 6 bricks, 2 bags (5kg/11¼lb) lumpwood charcoal (the flavour imparted by this is superior to that of briquettes - a light smoky note rather than a petrol one), pressure cooker, square of muslin, 16 long metal tandoor skewers, long-armed tongs, spice grinder, food processor, 2 square pizza stones.

### **BRINING THE CHICKEN**

1. Combine the water and salt in a container and stir well from time to time to dissolve the salt.
2. Meanwhile, remove the bone from the thighs by cutting around the bone and drawing it away from the meat. Make three slashes across the thick side of each thigh so that the marinade will be better able to penetrate.
3. Add the chicken thighs to the brine, then cover and refrigerate for six hours.
4. Pour off the brine and rinse the thighs under cold running water. Fill the container with fresh cold water and leave the thighs to soak in it for two hours, changing the water every 30 minutes to wash off the salt. Drain the chicken and pat dry.

### **PREPARING THE RUB**

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Trim the tops off three of the garlic bulbs to expose a little of the individual cloves. (Be sure not to cut the root end.) Drizzle a little olive oil over each bulb and wrap individually in squares of aluminium foil. Roast for 30-35 minutes, or until soft. Leave to cool completely.
2. Meanwhile, separate the three remaining garlic bulbs into cloves and peel them.
3. Unwrap the roasted bulbs and squeeze 50g (about two bulbs) of the garlic purée into a food processor, reserving the rest. Add the peeled garlic cloves, ginger, olive oil and salt. Blend until the mixture has a paste-like consistency.
4. Generously coat the chicken in the rub, making sure to push it into the incisions. Cover and refrigerate for five hours. It is always best to use organic, free-range chicken thighs. The quality of a well-reared bird will really show through.

### **PREPARING THE YOGHURT MARINADE**

1. While the chicken is refrigerated, preheat the oven to 130C/250F/Gas ½.
2. Prepare a garam masala by combining all the spices and the bay leaves. Scatter the mixture over a large baking sheet and roast for 1-1½ hours, shaking occasionally,

until the spices become aromatic. Leave to cool.

3. Tip the spices into a spice grinder and grind to a powder. Pass the spices through a fine sieve to remove any husks or large unground bits. Transfer to an airtight container. This yields more garam masala than you need for this recipe, but it can be stored for several weeks and used in a variety of other recipes.

4. Melt the ghee in a small saucepan over a medium heat. When it starts to bubble, whisk in all the chickpea flour until fully incorporated. Continue whisking for one minute to cook the flour. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. (Incorporating this roux will help the marinade to stick to the chicken.)

5. Place a small frying pan over a medium heat. Pour in the oil, then add the chilli powder. Fry for 2-3 minutes, then leave to cool.

6. Tip the yoghurt, chilli/oil mixture and ground fenugreek leaves into a large bowl. Add 10g/½oz of the garam masala and the chickpea flour roux. Stir to combine.

7. Remove the chicken from the rub and brush off most, but not all, of the ginger-garlic mixture. Place the chicken in the yoghurt marinade and toss to coat thoroughly. Cover the bowl and place in the fridge for ten hours.

### **MAKING THE CASHEW NUT BUTTER**

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4.

2. Spread the cashews out on a baking sheet. Roast for ten minutes, or until golden-brown.

3. Tip the cashews into a food processor while still warm and blend to form a paste. (You might need to add two teaspoons of melted ghee to help this process along.)

4. Remove the mixture from the food processor and reserve for the finished dish.

### **TOASTING THE MELON SEEDS**

1. Place a frying pan over a medium heat, add the ghee and the melon seeds and stir continuously for 3-5 minutes, or until the seeds are nut brown.

2. Season with salt and leave to cool on a piece of kitchen paper.

### **PREPARING THE MASALA SAUCE BASE**

1. Toast the coriander and cumin seeds. This should be done in a low oven as the spices have been done for the garam masala blend above.

2. Meanwhile, wash the tomatoes and remove the cores, keeping the tomatoes whole.

3. Bag the toasted spices in a square of muslin. Place the bag in a small pressure cooker with the water and tomatoes. Put on the lid and place over a medium heat. Bring to full pressure, then cook for 20 minutes. Set aside to cool.

4. Once cool, remove the lid and place the tomato mixture back on the hob. Cook over a high heat, stirring frequently, for 10-15 minutes, or until the sauce has reduced by half. Discard the bag of spices. Strain the tomatoes through a sieve.

5. Melt the ghee in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the chilli powder and fry for 2-3 minutes.

6. Turn the heat down to low. Add the onions, ginger and salt and cook for ten

minutes, or until the onions are soft but not coloured. Turn the heat back up to medium, and cook for a further five minutes, or until golden.

7. Stir in the tomato purée and the roasted garlic and cook for 2-3 minutes. Add the strained tomato sauce and cook for ten minutes, stirring constantly.

8. Turn the heat down to low. Add the garam masala, fenugreek seeds and turmeric, and simmer for five minutes.

9. Allow the sauce base to cool while you cook the chicken.

### **COOKING THE CHICKEN**

1. Light the barbecue and leave for 15-20 minutes, until glowing red. As the coal burns down, top it up, allowing for plenty of airflow through the vents.

2. Meanwhile, shake most of the marinade off the chicken and place on a board with the narrowest end towards you. Take a skewer and hold it parallel to the right-hand, longer side of the thigh. Place it 1cm/½in in from the edge and weave it in and out of the chicken. Weave another skewer along the left-hand side of the thigh in similar fashion. Push the chicken to the middle of the skewers, leaving about 15cm/6in clearance between the chicken and the tip of the skewer. Repeat with the remaining thighs.

3. Using tongs, clear the charcoal from the centre of the barbecue. Place the first three bricks in a triangle in the base of the barbecue. Stack three more bricks on top of the first three, leaving a hole large enough to fit the chicken inside.

4. Build up new coal around the perimeter of the triangle so that it is almost level with the top of the bricks. (No coal should be on the bottom, or the fat will drip on to it and cause flaming.) Allow this new coal to burn until it is glowing and grey. This will take at least an hour, and it is important to wait so that the bricks have time to absorb enough heat to radiate into the chicken.

5. One by one, brush the skewered thighs lightly with ghee and place them inside the brick 'chimney'. Turn the skewers every minute until golden-brown on both sides.

6. When an even char has developed, remove the skewers and set aside while you cook the remaining ones. Leave the cooked chicken to cool slightly before cutting into large chunks.

### **ASSEMBLING THE FINISHED DISH**

1. Heat the masala sauce in a pan (this can be the same pan as it was made in provided it is large enough to hold all the chicken).

2. Add the yoghurt and the coconut milk and very gently simmer together for 1-2 minutes.

3. Add the pieces of cut chicken and simmer very gently for ten minutes. It is then best to cool the mixture and store in the fridge for 6-12 hours, or until the next day, to develop both flavour and texture. However, this is not essential, and you can proceed directly to the next step.

4. Fold in the butter to finish the sauce.

5. Fold in some cashew nut butter according to taste, and adjust the seasoning with

salt.

6. Serve with a sprinkling of melon seeds and the chopped chilli.

### **MAKING THE NAAN**

1. Sift all the dry ingredients together and place in the bowl of a mixer fitted with a hook attachment.

2. Add the water, milk and eggs, incorporating them on a low speed.

3. Once all the liquid ingredients are incorporated, mix for three minutes on a low speed followed by one minute at a medium speed.

4. When the dough is well mixed, transfer it to a generously floured work surface and knead by hand for an additional two minutes.

5. Divide the dough into 100g/3½oz portions (12 pieces), roll into balls and place on a floured baking sheet. Cover with cling film and refrigerate for at least two hours before using.

6. Remove all the racks from the oven and place two square pizza stones in the bottom in a V-shape: each stone should rest against the oven wall on either side and meet in the middle at a 45 degree angle. If your oven has room for only one pizza stone, you can use a small baking sheet or another metallic object to keep it against the oven wall at a 45 degree angle. Preheat the oven, with the top grill set at 100 per cent for 20 minutes.

7. Flour a work surface and place a floured ball of dough on it. Oil your hands and flatten the dough with the tips of your fingers until you have a disc approximately 20cm/8in in diameter. Repeat with the other balls of dough.

8. Place one or two pieces of flattened dough on a floured pizza peel (or the back of a baking sheet) and brush lightly with melted ghee. (Alternatively, you can make a 'cushion' out of folded tea towels and place the naan on this before transferring to the oven, as Heston does in the video.)

9. Put the sheet on top of the stones as far back in the oven as possible. Note: If you have two stones in the oven, you can bake two naan at a time. If not, you will have to bake one at a time.

10. Bake for 1 minute 40 seconds, then remove and bake the remaining naan in the same way. Serve immediately.